PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN KENYA AS A MAJOR STRATEGY FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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Abstract:
The new Kenyan curriculum emphasizes the role of parents as essential to their children's education and in the success of curriculum implementation. The development requires a change in how parents and the community interact with schools and education. The perception in Kenya has always been that education is the sole responsibility of the school and the teacher. And so, parental involvement in Kenya has mainly been limited to financial contributions and teacher-parent meetings. With the introduction of new curriculum, the role of parent is crucial for the academic success of the child. A literature study investigated the extent of parental involvement in primary schools in Kenya. The data is obtained from a variety of library articles addressing parental involvement in Primary schools in different counties in Kenya. The current study found that majority of parents are involved in their children's education, however, more awareness of the parental involvement is needed and more strategies on parental involvement needs to be employed for the success of the new curriculum.

Keywords: parental involvement, academic achievement, primary schools

1. Introduction

The most effective schools are now widely considered the ones that encourage and support the involvement of parents and other family members in the education of their children (Grant and Ray 2010, Barlome, Mamat and Masnan 2017). Peters (2012) notes that "*when schools have reputations for being successful, they generally have lots of engagement from parents*" (p. 46). It is therefore important to investigate the extent of parental involvement in schools so that guidance on effective involvement can be based on actual evidence from schools. The focus of this paper is on the findings of surveys of parental involvement practices in primary schools in Kenya, with an aim of adding to

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the existing knowledge. This investigation is triggered by the implementation of the new curriculum in the Kenyan system of education (a 2-6-6-3 education system), which was rolled out in January 2018, and that offers parents the opportunity to be involved in their children's education (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development -KICD 2017). This is because the basic tenets of the curriculum require teachers to meet the requirements, interests, and talents of every child, while diagnosing the learner's need. The parent therefore is required to be part and parcel of the child's learning (KICD 2017). Among all these other factors, the Kenyan Competency Based Curriculum (KCBC) will ensure learners acquire competencies and skills to meet the human resource aspirations of Kenya's vision 2030 blue print for development (KICD 2017). Thus, parents must be considered a constant and principle component of curriculum (Nihat and Gurbuzturk 2013). Together with the new curriculum, day school wings have been started in selected secondary schools across the counties in Kenya, as a measure to increase transition rates to secondary schools. This call for more parental involvement in order to make the new development a success.

Extensive international research supports the potential of parental involvement for improved academic achievement and social outcomes for children of all ages (Duan, Guan and Bu 2018; Jeynes 2016; Wang, Deng and Yang 2016). Parental involvement refers to parental participation in the educational process and experiences of their children (Jeynes 2005, p. 245). The phrase "parental involvement" in this paper is used typically to denote any adult who is a primary caregiver of a child's basic needs. This includes: biological parents; other relatives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, or siblings; and non-biological parents such as adoptive, foster, or stepparents. One or two of the adult(s) guide the child's upbringing, which includes the interaction processes between him/her and child that contribute to the child's emotional and social development. Berk & Meyers (2016) school programs are planned educational experiences aimed at enhancing the development of young children and so the involvement of the parent influences holistic development of children.

2. The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to establish the extent of parental involvement on young children's academic performance.

2.1 Statement of the Problem

This paper is based on the premise that throughout life one encounters different environments which affect their learning. As one interacts within these environments, one co-constructs the experiences with the other players, the person shapes and is equally shaped by the others. Learning is enhanced when there is interaction between the child and the environment (family, school and the community) and that is what the new curriculum in Kenya advocates. In the past, much emphasis has been on producing leaners whose vision is geared towards academic excellence and unhealthy competition at the expense of their lives. For example, in Kenya, the 8.4.4 system has a broadly-

based practical curriculum at all levels and consists of eight years in primary school, four years in secondary and a minimum of four years at university (Onsomu, et al. 2004, Ngigi and Macharia 2006). Significant developments have been achieved with the number of learning institutions increasing gradually since independence (Onsomu et al 2004). However, the 8.4.4 system digressed from its initial intended purpose and gradually resorted to preparing learners towards passing examinations, acquiring white collar employment and general wealth creation. Thus, according to Onsomu et al (2004), the 8.4.4 system is characterized by low transition rates from primary level to secondary level, which reveals high wastage rates, especially at primary school, and it is unfortunate given that this could be the only level of formal education open to majority of children in their lifetime. Research reveals that most parents believe that education is free and therefore, they do not want to be involved in the running of schools (Kenya National Commission for UNESCO 2005).

Consequently, only a small number of parents concerns themselves with what happens at school, others are concerned because they are either part of the Parent-Teachers Associations or Board of Governors (BOGs), even with the fact that Kenyan educational policy advocates for parental involvement. For instance, the Basic Government of Kenya Education Act (2013) requires the school boards of management to assess school needs with full participation of parents. Other parents appear in schools when their children are involved in special events or cases of indiscipline. Parental involvement is limited to financial contribution and the Parent-Teacher Association. However, the government remains committed to providing quality education for all Kenyans. Thus, the introduction of the new curriculum (Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development -KICD 2017) emphasizes the role of parents in a child's education as integral to the curriculum's successful implementation. The new curriculum aims at early identification and nurturing of talents; the introduction of national values and national cohesion and their integration into the curriculum (KICD 2017). The goal of the new curriculum can successfully be achieved with the parents' involvement in their children's education. Thus, the need to understand and explore parental involvement mainly in the Kenyan context.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Bronfenbrenner (1994) asserts that learning is a social process affected by forces at many levels. The influence of the immediate context (microsystems) and interactions among them (the mesosystem) on human development. The theory is formulated around academic achievement which encompasses various dimensions of student interactions including school, community, and social factors (Pena 2007). Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory on education recognizes that among the many different spheres of social influences that create contexts for learner development, there are many possibilities for intervention, and the involvement of parents in the education of their children is one of them. As noted by Epstein (1995) children are directly involved in at least three important contexts: family, school, and community. Epstein details the six types of the parental involvement on their children's learning outcomes. The six types

of parental involvement are parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making and community collaboration. Each of the six practices are explained below. Parenting according to Epstein helps all families establish home environments to support children as learners. Parenting entails also parent education, family support programs and home visits. Communication include designing of effective forms of school-to-home and home-to-school communications about school program and children's progress. Volunteering involves recruiting and organizing parent help and support, school and classroom volunteer program to help teachers, administrators, students and other parents. Learning at home also provides information and ideas to families about how to help pupils at home with homework and other curriculum-related activities. Decision-making and collaboration is also vital. Epstein (1995) theory advocates for parents to participate in decision making in school, in leadership and advocacy groups. The school collaboration with community helps in identifying and integrating of resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices and student learning and development.

This framework is key in parental involvement as children move between these influential environments that build attitudes and readiness for learning: at home and at school. Thus, family involvement research clearly demonstrates that children thrive academically when the family and the school agree that they are stronger together than apart. Schools and homes that share values, information, and the hard work of teaching give children the stability, consistency and encouragement they need for academic success. However, parents often experience substantial barriers to their involvement in education and the extent and nature of family-school community partnerships differ by socioeconomic status and the parent level of education.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Importance of Parental Involvement in Children's Education
The importance of parental involvement cannot be overstated because it is apparent from the studies that parental involvement plays a significant role in the education process of a child (Henderson and Mapp 2002: Wheeler and Cannor 2009). Parents are considered to be the first teachers in the child's life. Although each child's life is shaped by many agents of socialization including teachers, media, playmates and peers, the family has the first influence on the child and remains one of the most significant (Lightfoot et.al, 2013).

Quality learning environment can also be influenced by fathers as well as mothers. Studies show that fathers who are interested and who get involved in their children's education, can have a positive impact on both social and emotional development and their children tend to achieve more at school and have better social outcomes (Wheeler & Cannor, 2009).

From the theological perspective, parental involvement in their children's education is emphasized, the responsibility of teaching children is assigned to parents (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). From this perspective, teachers should not substitute the work of

parents but rather should complement it. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) said that *"children learn and develop well in enabling environments, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between the teachers and parents"* (p. 8). Therefore, the parents and the teachers should combine their efforts for the welfare of the child.

Further, researches support the notion that parental involvement in children's education has positive outcomes as the parents gain knowledge about school activities and therefore render valuable guidance to their children. So, their engagement in their child education serves as a motivator that bridges the gap between two contexts, the home and school (Echaune et. al., 2015). Ndirangu and Kibaara (2014) in a mixed method study found out that parents who are actively involved in ensuring that their children adhere to school rules and regulations and participate freely in meetings, are involved in their children's education, and so their children are highly disciplined, and so remain in school and perform better in academic work.

3.2 Different Ways and Levels of Involving Parents in Elementary School Programs

According to research, parental involvement in education is summarized into parental involvement at home and at school (Beaty, 1988; Carey et al., 1998). There are several ways parents can be involved. Parents can be involved in policy formation and can also act as resource persons, whereby they can be part of Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), others have the expertise in training and speaking at workshops and in writing schools' newsletters. Some parents do not mind acting as teacher aides by assisting in the classroom or in the preparation of materials. It is necessary for the schools to know parents' area of specialization so that their potentials can be fully utilized.

Parents also can collaborate with teachers to contribute not just information about their children but also in engaging in learning activities at home, including helping with reading skills and checking homework. Supervising children and monitoring how they spend their time out of school. They can also encourage pupils to talk about school and what they are learning. Further, attending school events, going to parent-teacher conference, meeting with teachers, and volunteering in the classroom or school, are all practices that motivate children to learn.

3.3 Factors that Influence Parental Involvement in Children's Education

There are many factors that influence the extent to which parents participate in their children's education at home, in school and within the community. Almost all of the factors that are mentioned below are influenced by individual and institutional beliefs and practices of child rearing. Research shows that parental participation is related to socioeconomic status, that is, the environment in which parents and children live, their income levels, working conditions and cultural factors. All these, dictates how much time is available to parents and so their contribution to their children's education (Marphatia et. al, 2010). Other factors that influence parental participation include parents' attitudes towards school and education, the cultural differences between home and schools, and the cultural and emotional issues of teacher-parent interactions (Allen

2011 and Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1997). The parent's and teacher's attitudes are very important in determining parental involvement in children's education.

3.4 Barriers to Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in their children's education depends so much on parents' and teachers' view of this involvement. Parents come to school with expectations for their children, and also ideas about education that are based on all of their own prior school and life experiences. Some parents view the relationship between themselves and teachers as a partnership. Other parents view the educational process as one that is conducted within the borders of the school and does not involve the home, as long as they have fulfilled all what the school requires of them. They happily hand in the responsibility of teaching children to teachers. On the other hand, the way the teachers view parents' involvement in their children's education is very important because it determines the relationship between the teacher-and-the parent and the teacher-and-the child.

Teachers' attitudes might facilitate or hinder parental involvement. Teachers often lack the confidence and knowledge to work with parents, and schools do not always recognize or value the ways in which parents are already engaged with children's learning. Unfortunately, schools generally do not collect sufficient data on their own interventions, particularly relating to the impact on academic outcomes. So sometimes, they even blame poor pupil performance on parents, not knowing that parents face numerous logistical barriers to engagement including costs, time and transport. Some teachers may even think that parents do not care about their children's education because they do not attend their scheduled parent-teacher meetings. They talk bad about those parents and become hostile toward them. Some even say parents make their work hard. So, they do not want to create room for the parents to participate particularly in any class activities. If a parent happens to have an encounter with teachers who do not respect them or their children, they make such a parent feel isolated from school.

Studies suggest some common attitudes that teachers may hold toward parents can contribute significantly toward the stress caused by teacher-parent relationships (Hornby, 2011; Marphatia 2010). Some of the identified attitudes in these studies includes the fact that parents are viewed as: (1) being either problems or challengers (2) the cause of their children's problems (3) vulnerable, (4) less able and in need of treatment. For these reasons, these teachers tend to distance themselves from the parents and their expectations are that parental participation be limited to making financial contributions to schools and to attending Parent-Teachers Association meetings (PTA). Even when parents are involved it is restricted to summoning them to discuss problems of attendance and children's poor performance or to resolve conflicts rather than encouraging wider parental involvement in school. While a few these teachers may have some inconsistent expectations, a number of teachers are highly supportive of parents' involvement. For instance, teachers are open to parental involvement that they invite parents in class to assist them in drawings, painting and

even accompanying children for field trips. Others have encouraged families to come for prayer days and spiritual nurture for young children. Allen (2007) noted that getting parents involved is connected with school success. Henderson and Mapp (2002) also found out that many forms of family and community involvement influenced student achievement at all ages. Educators who understand this concept through great efforts have found ways of inviting parents into genuine partnerships.

For instance, some schools that are sponsored by Non-governmental organization (NGO) in the slums in Nairobi, make local arrangements with the parents on how they can get involved in their children's education. They encourage parental participation through Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), volunteer work and other forums. Their strategies include having parents sign contracts to ensure their support of their children's learning, home visits, getting parents who have businesses to donate food for the children who are in need of food, and offering parenting classes such as discipline with love, effects of alcohol on children, HIV/AIDS among others.

Volunteer parents work at least once a month. They have a school calendar whereby each parent chooses a date that they are available to volunteer. They are also required to choose the areas that they are comfortable working in such as kitchen, library, classroom, administration, material preparation etc. The parent then signs in an agreement form to ensure their commitment. The signing in for the volunteer services depends so much on parent's view of involvement. Some parents take it as an opportunity to serve their children. And so, to them it is a way of contributing to their children's education as most of them do not afford to pay the school feels but depends on the organizations' support. If parents are committed and cannot volunteer, they sometimes engage someone in the community to do the work they could have done in school and pay them for the services they offer to the school. According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997), the parent's basic decision to become involved in children's education is primarily influenced by three things: the parent's view of his or her role in the child's life, the parent's sense of usefulness for helping his/her child succeed in school and the general invitations, demands and opportunities for parental involvement presented by both the child and the preschool. These ideas determine whether the parent will have the interest or will be involved in their children's education.

3.5 Benefits for Parental Involvement in Children's Education

There are suggestions of benefits for parents who engage in their children's education. For instance, the parent becomes active participant in their child's programming. They gain knowledge about development of the child in a school setting, as well as confidence and competence as they help their children with school work (Beaty, 1988). Parents benefit from an improved parent-child relationship. A good parent-child relationship leads to increased contact with the school and to a better understanding of the child's development and the educational processes in school, which could help parents to become better "teachers" at home, e.g. a parent may learn how to use more positive forms of reinforcement (Henderson and Mapp, 2002).

Greater parental involvement leads to teachers having better relationships with parents and, reduced workload and more positive attitude toward teaching (Lueder 2011). Pupils, on the other hand increase prosocial behavior (Roul 2015; Cormer and Haynes 1991). Regular communication occurs between parents and educators. Parents are kept up-to-date on the activities and progress being made by their child. Parents can share what is happening at home, share the strategies that are working for them and request support to address particular goals and routines. The network of relationships for parents is expanded, including building an existing family and community supports and connecting with other parents. This is particularly very helpful for parents with children who have special needs, because they get to connect with other parents with the same challenges and are able to get referrals whenever their children need special attention. In addition, the network helps parents to develop advocacy skills and learn how to access services in their community for their child and the family. For instance, a parent with autism will interact with other parents and will know about the intervention programs. In addition, teachers get support and appreciation from parents and so they gain knowledge and understanding of children's homes, families and out-of-school activities.

3.6 The Role of Educators in Engaging Parents

Educators should make effort to assess family viewpoints regarding the educational setting and process in a sensitive manner. This is because the process of assessment forms the basis of the relationship between the family and the teachers. In order to involve parents in their children's education it is vital for educators to develop an understanding of the families where the children come from. That is the reason home visits are very vital. Families may be coming from the same area, but they may all be different from each other. They may also respond differently to children's need. Therefore, the need to get to know individual families in order to engage them successfully. Knowing families well reduces the temptation to stereotype and negative assumptions about parents' abilities, attitudes, lifestyles and interest in education. Schools which successfully engage parents make use of a broad understanding of parents' engagement (abilities), and their parental engagement strategies, and values of the parents they aimed at. Parental engagement with children's learning is effectively supported when parents receive clear, specific and targeted information from schools.

Family viewpoints are strongly rooted in cultural perspectives, which greatly influence beliefs regarding child development and differences in goals for children's education (Hornby, 2011). Thus, educator needs to be culturally sensitive. This does not mean knowing everything there is to know about every culture that is represented in the school. It implies knowing that cultural differences and similarities, and so an educator becomes aware of the general parameters of those cultures and the cultural differences that are likely to affect parental involvement in school.

Educators need to communicate and partner with families in order to promote their involvement. Majority of the elementary schools rely on newsletters or other printed material to pass on information to parents. The printed material includes the

school diary. Communication promote parental involvement and at the same time may act as a barrier to parental involvement, if information is delayed or distorted.

3.7 Parental Involvement Intervention Programs

Many of the programs aimed at increasing parent involvement in school, focus most of the time on changing parent behaviour than on changing school practices because the programs most of the time are developed by education administrators and researchers and so are biased (Tucker 2014). Communication is crucial in such programs, because it allows a teacher and a parent to discuss the kind of program that will help them as they partner to educate a child. In addition, parents need to have clear information about what will be happening at school and what their role is in the process. Communication channels established by schools to inform and assist parents should be therefore effective, in order to engage them at home and at school.

4. Method of the Current Study

The present study relied on the analysis of library documents in investigating parental involvement practices in Kenya and the influence of this involvement on children's academic achievement. A web search for research on parental involvement was done to obtain all the studies on parental involvement on academic performance of primary school children in Kenya. Several studies were found. However, a purposeful sampling of the seven studies dealing with parental involvement in elementary schools was obtain from six counties. Studies from six counties where such studied were done. However, two studies were obtained from Nairobi County not only because of her large population but also because one of the studies was done in the slums. The studies were analyzed so as to have extensive understanding of parental involvement in the Kenyan context. The seven studies were reviewed from Kilifi County, Nairobi County, Nandi County, Embu County, Busia County, and Machakos County.

5. Findings in Kenyan Context on Parental Involvement

The studies in Kenyan context generally support the positive correlation between parental involvement and children's learning outcomes. In a quasi-experimental education intervention study done by Abuya et al. (2014) involving over 1,200 girls living in two Nairobi urban slums, girls were exposed to various education intervention packages, with one intervention involving parental participation. Evidence from this study revealed that girls enjoy parental involvement in their schooling and that significantly improved their educational aspirations than those girls not exposed to parental involvement package of the intervention. Similarly, the same girls significantly increased their numeracy and literacy than those not exposed to parental involvement intervention package. From that report, there is evidence that parental involvement in their children's schooling goes a long way in shaping and molding their children's educational outcome. Ondieki (2012) in her qualitative study on parental involvement

in children's academic work in Nairobi County, found out that various activities parents participate in such meeting attendance, communication with school and volunteering influenced the academic performance of children.

According to Kipkorir (2014) who did his study in Nandi County, parents with higher levels of educational attainment are more involved at school, more likely to discuss educational issues at home, and have higher educational expectations for their children than the parents with lower levels of education attainment. However, parental lack of awareness of the roles expected of them, and their obligations towards education can be attributed to weak communication of these expectations and policy framework. A qualitative study on Parental Involvement in Public Primary Schools in Kenya (Embu County) by Kimu (2012) concludes that a society needs to increase its level of educational involvement and that starts with the support by the parents. He claims that parent-school linkages of parents to the school, the teacher/parent relationship is critical to pupils' success and parental involvement. For Kimu, inadequate communication was the major reason for the lack of parental involvement, especially the lack of clear, straightforward and helpful information by the teacher to parents. Kimu (2012) also found out that parents demonstrated a consistent lack of awareness of the full content of education policies. Given that the parents are aware that education is free and mandatory, and so they no longer need to pay school fees, they remain unaware of the roles and responsibilities that the policies ascribe to them with respect to school-engagement and governance issues (Government of Kenya Education Act 2013).

According to Kimu's study (2012), teachers and parents expressed different views when it came to parental involvement. Teachers expressed the views that parents were disinterested in the school, were illiterate and had little time for school involvement because of work obligations. On the other hand, parents revealed that they were indeed aware of their basic obligations and tried to meet them, although not all parents knew how to help their children. Kirimi and Muteti (2016) on the assessment of parental involvement in learner retention in public primary schools of Malindi sub-county in Kilifi County, agree with Kimu (2012) that the commonest reason for children dropping out of school is lack of interest on the parents owing to their own illiteracy. The findings supported by the Kenya National Adult Literacy Survey Report, conducted by Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS 2007) that revealed that most adults in Kenya are illiterate. Kirimi and Muteti (2016) however found out that parents who supervise their pupils learning during homework, greatly influence the learner retention.

A study done in Machakos County by Mudaki (2016) on parental involvement in children's reading comprehension, and with 104 respondents, found out that parental involvement in children's reading has significant influence not only on reading achievement, language comprehension and expression skills but also on pupils' interest in reading, attitudes towards reading and attentiveness in classroom.

Further, a mixed method study in Busia County, by Manasi et al (2015) on parental involvement in provision of teaching and learning resources, with 532 respondents, revealed low parental involvement in provision of teaching and learning

resources, the study also found out that there was a significant relationship between parental involvement in academic performance of children. A point supported by Donkor (2010) in his qualitative research study that included 50 participants situated in Ghana, explored the parental perceptions toward education, found out that parents held many different views with regard to the academic performance of their children. However, parents of students who were doing poorly in school admitted that lack of proper supervision of homework was the primary reason their children were not doing well academically. So far, the literature review revealed that parents' personal perceptions of their own efficacy regarding their ability to support their children or engage in schools play a significant part in determining the level of extent of their involvement both within schools and at home (Ndirangu and Kibaara 2014; Kimu 2012; MOEST 1998). Parental attitudes and perceptions of themselves and their own capacity to engage partly influence and determine the kind of actions they undertake.

5.1 Recommendations

- The current study found that parents were eager to participate in children's education despite the numerous challenges they encounter, including lack of knowhow on how to get involved. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education together with Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), to come up with a manual which can help parents learn ways of engagement in their children's learning at home and in school and in particular in the wake of the new curriculum implementation. The parents will have the information thus reducing ignorance amongst them.
- Parents should be educated on the importance of cultivating a culture of involving themselves in school related activities. Educative programs should be designed for parents and also for teachers to shed more light on the need of parental involvement.
- The schools' administrators and the teachers also need to strategize on how to involve parents by coming up with programs that engage the parents and making them partners in what goes on in school.

6. Conclusion

When young children start school, there are many factors that influence the success of their experiences as they interact with other children, different families, and educators. Children interact with others and respond to the world around them according to what they have learned in their homes from their families. However, as they grow up there are many changes that are taking place. For instance, they are attaining milestones as they develop in all the domains, they are also facing transitional changes and so forth. These many adjustments are likely to have profound and long-lasting effects if the importance of maintaining unity and continuity is not well understood. Thus, parental involvement in young children's education is very important in facilitating the child's easy transition and successful attainment of developmental milestones.

It is important to note what influences parental involvement in children's education. The parent's basic decision to become involved in children's education is primarily influenced by three things: the parent's view of his or her role in the child's life, the parent's sense of usefulness for helping his/her child succeed in school and the general invitations, demands and opportunities for parental involvement presented by both the child and the school. These ideas determine whether the parent will have the interest or will be involved in their children's education. Parental involvement has several benefits to the child, the parent, the teacher, and the school. Therefore, schools should strive to promote parental involvement in order to partner with the parents in educating the children. They can only promote parental involvement through effective strategies. As discussed in this paper, communication is one of the strategies that schools can use to foster parental involvement. Communication may act as a barrier to parental involvement if there is not enough information flowing from both home and school. School should facilitate a two-way flow of information about children's development and progress with parents and teachers. Thus, effective parental involvement in children's education is related to child's success in academic and social development skills.

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